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THE WHITE CANOE

by

William F. Brewster

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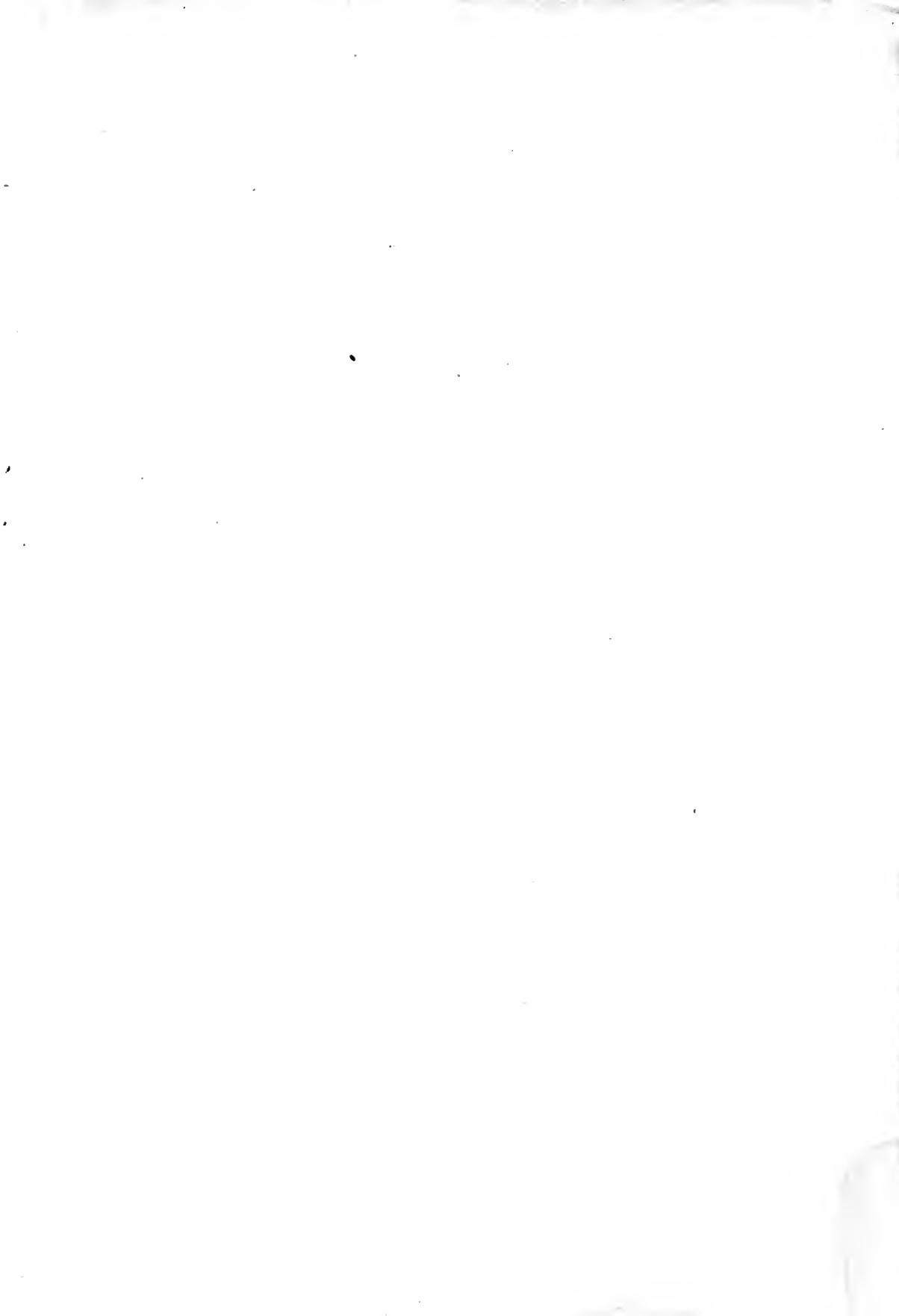
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*Where the serried waves like chargers madly leaping  
to the fray.*

# THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE CANOE

BY

## WILLIAM TRUMBULL.

WITH PHOTOGRAVURES FROM DESIGNS BY

F. V. DU MOND

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

## LONDON

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DEDICATED  
TO  
A. L. T. T.

Long before the solitudes of western New York were disturbed by the advent of the white man, it was the custom of the Indian tribes to assemble occasionally at Niagara, and offer sacrifice to the Spirit of the Falls.

This sacrifice consisted of a white birch-bark canoe, which was sent over the terrible cliff, filled with ripe fruits and blooming flowers, and bearing the fairest girl in the tribe who had just attained the age of womanhood.

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## I.

### PROEM.

**M**ILD the rush of mighty waters, in the thundering  
cataract's roar,

Where Niagara's streaming rapids down in headlong  
torrent pour;

Where the serried waves like chargers madly leaping  
to the fray,

Fling aloft their snowy crests and toss their manes of  
flying spray,

Rearing, plunging, onward urging—Nature's glorious  
cavalry !

Where th' eternal sweep of waters like the unending  
surge of time,

Pulsing, throbs in rhythmic measure to a wondrous  
strain sublime :

Dwells, so ancient legends say, the mighty Spirit of  
the Falls,

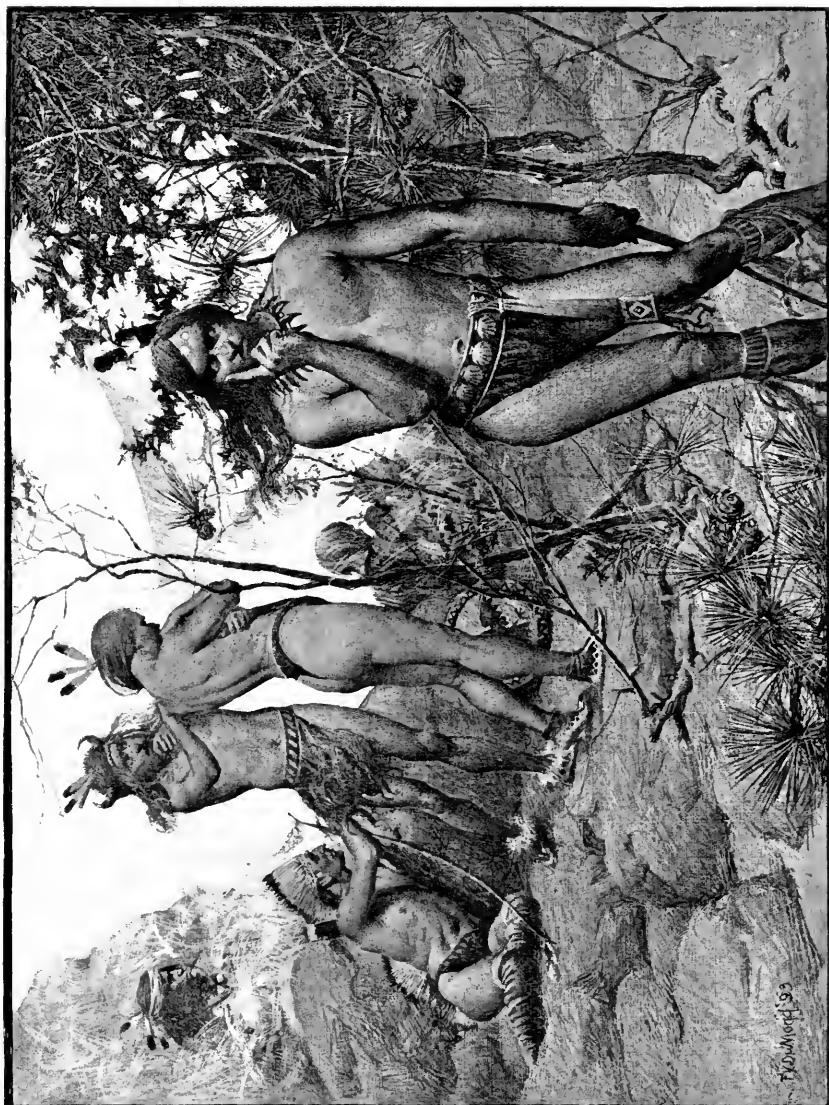
Who from out the tumult, hoarsely, for unbounded  
homage calls.



\* \* \* *As often as they listened, on the voices of the  
flood,*

*Deep were borne the Spirit's mutterings, calling fierce  
for human blood.*







Here the children of the forest, spellbound by that  
deafening roar,  
Stopped to gaze with listening wonder, in the simpler  
days of yore ;  
Awe-struck, gazed in silent worship, well beseeming  
Nature's child,  
As in chase they roamed the plain, or tracked in war  
the pathless wild :  
And as often as they listened, on the voices of the  
flood  
Deep were borne the Spirit's mutterings, calling fierce  
for human blood ;  
Ay, and sacrifice more cruel in that cry they under-  
stood :  
Gift of Nature's choicest treasure, peerless budding  
womanhood !





## II.

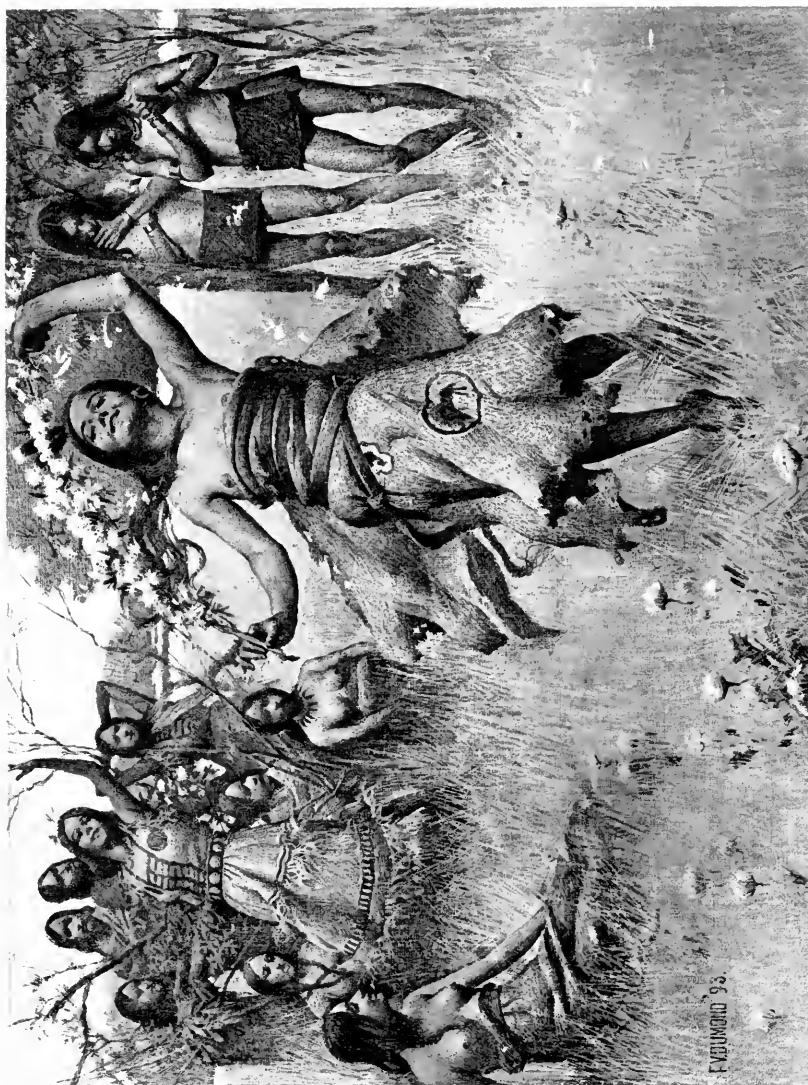
### WENONAH.

FAIREST of the laughing daughters by blue Sene-  
ca's rippling tide,  
Was the Indian maid, Wenonah, sturdy Kwasind's joy  
and pride:  
Eyes of laughter, like the sunshine dancing in her  
native lake,  
O'er whose depths, anon, fleet shadows chasing cast  
their trailing wake;  
Lips of tempting ruddy hue like mountain berries  
gleaming fair;  
Raven locks, whose glossy lustre shone like dark-stem-  
med maidenhair;  
Whilst rich mantling color tinged an olive cheek, whose  
crimson flush  
Vied with flaming woodland leaves when touched with  
Autumn's scarlet blush.



*She, hailed queen by all the maidens, led with merriest  
quip and song.*







And the music of her laughter, when amid the joyous  
throng,  
She, hailed Queen by all the maidens, led with merriest  
quip and song,  
Fell in sweetest rippling cadence, sounding thro' the  
leafy way  
Like the purl of hidden brooklet murmuring soft in  
distant play;  
As in freest fancy roving, far removed from cares or  
strife,  
With fresh eager zest exulting in youth's bounding  
sense of life,  
Bright she moved, a winsome picture, framed by  
Nature's matchless art  
In all scenes of joy and beauty royally to bear her  
part.



Yet to scenes of mirth not solely was her sunny presence lent;

Truer was her simple nature, to a nobler purpose bent: Only child of widow'd father, hers the sacred heritage, With the charm of winning girlhood, to make bright his lonely age.

What tho' ardently, nay fiercely, for her smiles the young braves strove

In all feats of savage daring—none as yet might claim her love;

She, with roguish, artless spirit, laughing in her gay caprice,

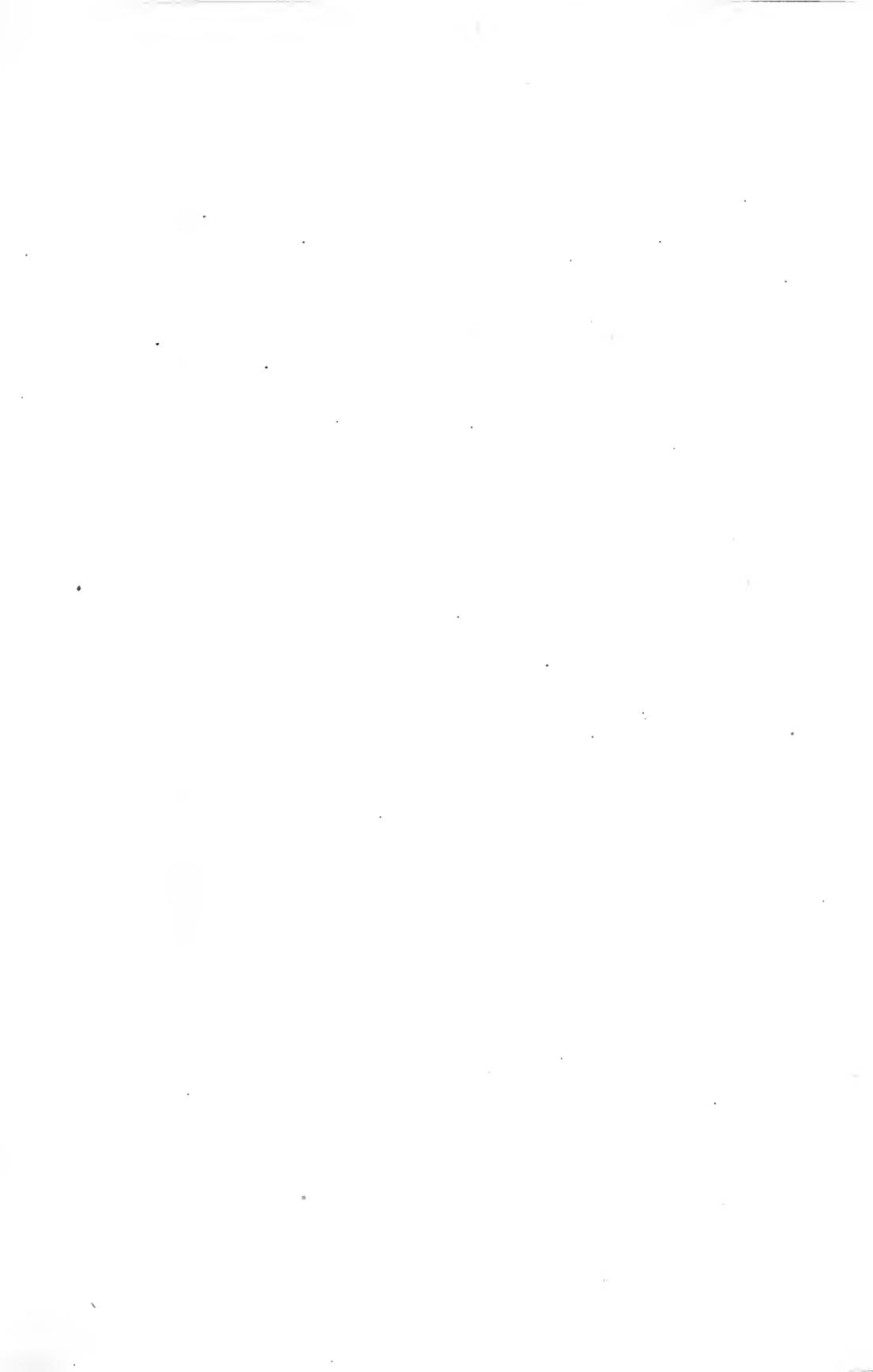
Found in loving, filial duty surer joys of heart-whole peace.



Just as when some sturdy giant of the forest, bending  
low,  
Bows before the axe and toppling falls with mighty  
crashing blow,  
Clinging tendrils, newly springing round the shattered  
trunk are seen  
Swift to hide its prostrate ruin 'neath a veil of living  
green,  
Guarding, shielding, closely nestling to their riven  
parent stock,  
Like mute sentient creatures fearful of rude gaze or  
heedless mock :  
So the maid her lonely father tended with fond, jealous  
pride,  
Steadfast, faithful to her trust, where none might woo  
her from his side.



\* \* \* *Grave attention holds the band.*









### III.

#### THE COUNCIL.

GATHERED is the warriors' council. Thro' the shadows of the night,  
Darkly gleams each dusky figure in the camp-fire's fitful light.  
Slowly round the silent circle moves the red-pipe's gleaming bowl,  
Thro' whose clouds each wreath'd sage, peering the dark future to unroll,  
Draws a drowsy, sweet contentment, for the moment, o'er his soul.  
Now, the brooding hush is broken; grave attention holds the band,  
For the Med'cine-man is speaking of the want throughout the land;  
Slow, in subtle craft, contrasting with the wealth of happier days  
Present dearth of fish and venison, withering blight upon their maize.



Well he speaks! His halting manner but betrays the  
deeper art  
Of his cunning soul vindictive; which full oft had  
conned this part,  
Since that day when in dim forest glade Wenonah  
spurned his quest,  
And with flaming scorn repelled the love his suppliant  
words confessed.  
Little recked the fearless maiden in that lonely, fateful  
hour,  
Dark appeal, mute, threatening gesture, hints of baleful  
fetich power;  
For while untaught reason wavered, blindly groping  
toward the light,  
Woman's faultless intuition read his lying heart aright!



“Senecas! Twice the rolling Autumn, with deep-laden  
malice fraught,

Years of blight and wasting sickness to your golden  
maize hath brought.

Yet again the dread plague threatens! Speak, deluded,  
hapless race,

Will ye, reckless, longer trust th’ uncertain product  
of the chase?

Hunted, driven, the startled red deer, fleeing, vanish  
from your sight!

Hark, the cry of fenland wild-geese, parting on their  
southward flight!

E'en your lake trout, lurking wary, yield but scanty  
livelihood—

Will ye see your children starving? Answer, Senecas!  
Is it good?



*Came the Spirit of the Waters, wreathed in billowy  
clouds of spray.*







“Listen! To your dreaming Meda, while in troubled  
sleep he lay,  
Came the Spirit of the Waters, wreathed in billowy  
clouds of spray :—  
‘Wherefore do My children shun Me? Where the  
grateful offering rare  
Of the maid and first-fruits choicest, which they once  
were wont to bear?  
Has *prosperity* thus turned them from the faith of  
simpler days?  
Let them heed, lest FAMINE seal My warning blight  
upon their maize !’  
So He spake, with muttered thunderings, leaving me  
as one for dead.  
Need I counsel? Heed the warning! Yet delay not!  
—I have said.”



Ceased the speaker, 'mid a silence, chill, foreboding as  
the grave,  
Save where some sage, nodding grayhead growl of half-  
conviction gave,  
As at grim want's threatening horror, fear, by ghastly  
memories fed,  
Woke to flame the smouldering embers of a cruel faith  
nigh dead ;  
Or perchance, some young brave, chafing sore in hot,  
rebellious mood,  
With the first warm flush of manhood 'gainst a bygone  
creed of blood,  
Carried past his wiser fellows, borne by love's impetuous  
stream,  
Muttered curse both deep and savage on the Meda's  
boding dream !



But all eyes were fixed on Kwasind, Strong Man,  
warrior proved and true,  
Whose brave heart, where others faltered, never fear  
nor weakness knew ;  
Hero of a thousand conflicts, scarred in visage, proud  
of mien,  
Foremost ever in rude battle, chase, or stirring council-  
scene :  
And their eyes were fixed upon him with a deep,  
expectant gaze,  
Watching for some answering signal which their  
sinking hearts might raise ;  
Hope and terror strangely blended in that wistful,  
furtive stare,  
Not unmixed with curious pity for a father's mute  
despair !



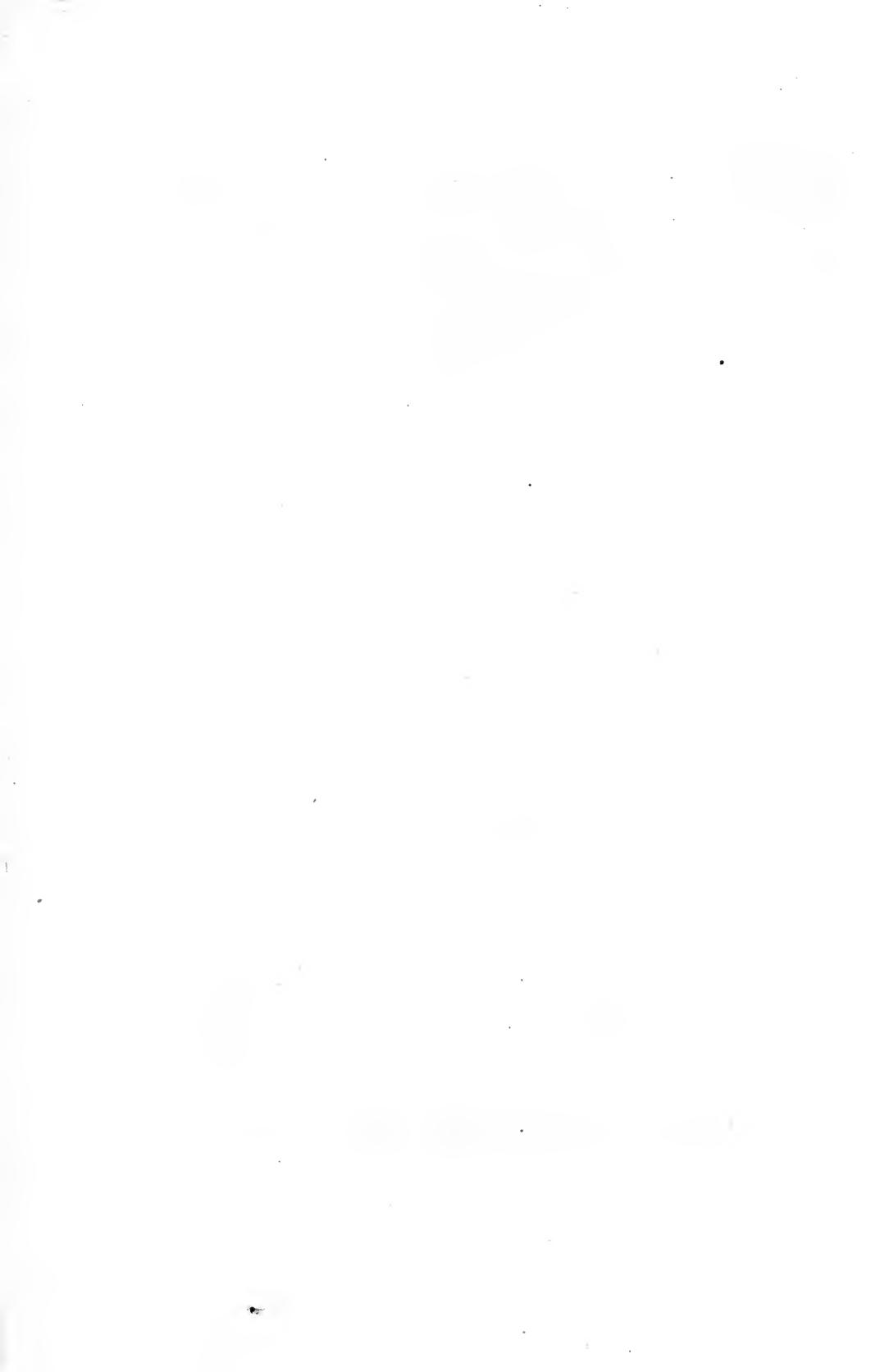
Long they sat, in silence waiting. Neither word, nor  
sign, nor glance  
From the Sachem came in answer to their wondering  
look askance.  
—Ah! the nameless, unseen terror of that shadowy  
Spirit-land,  
With its spectral shapes and phantoms,—who its power  
can understand?  
Now, in sudden wrath he starts at thought of pity from  
the rest,  
Crushes down the welling tumult surging thro' his  
anguished breast,  
Cloaks 'neath stoic, outward calm the grief he struggles  
to control—  
Lest perchance he may betray the finer feelings of his  
soul !



There he sits, all wrapped in silence, strangely mute,  
impassive grown,  
Drawn each stern and rigid feature like carved lines of  
chiselled stone ;  
Iron will and haughty spirit bravely answering to  
repress  
Quivering lip and trembling eyelid,—signals of his  
deep distress.  
See ! he meets their searching glance with head erect  
and flashing mien ;  
Slowly gazes round the assembly with unflinching air  
serene :  
Victor in th' unnatural conflict ; love and nature, both  
defied ;  
Slave to coward superstition ; thrall of idle savage  
pride !



*He made known his tidings bitter \* \* \**









## IV.

### KWASIND.

NOR when, once the conclave over, striding back  
    in anger wild  
To the hut, where all unconscious of her fate, his  
    darling child  
Rose to greet his late home-coming,—did his flood of  
    grief long-pent,  
In a burst of manlier feeling find, e'en then, its fitting  
    vent :  
But in tones of measured calmness, self-repressed, and  
    sternly brief,  
He made known his tidings bitter to her gaze of  
    wondering grief ;  
Nay, to that grim ordeal, harshly, bade her nerve her  
    trembling frame,  
For the welfare of her people, for the honor of his  
    name !



Yet, in lonely midnight vigil, when beneath the unwonted strain,  
Baffled nature rose rebellious, throbbing fierce in secret pain,  
Vowed he threat of direst vengeance, breathing forth an ominous hiss  
'Gainst the doting, idle dreamer:—"Curse him, he shall die for this!"  
Or as tenderer feelings, rushing with tumultuous ebb and roll,  
Stirred to ruth the deep recesses of his inmost troubled soul,  
Pity for her youth and beauty, doomed thus soon to fade and die,  
Found expression mute yet touching, in a long-drawn secret sigh.



Or he dwelt on her obedience, on her silent fortitude,  
Bowing to his will submissive, 'neath a blow so harsh  
and rude :

And it called to mind her mother, gentle slave of  
days long fled,

Slain, alas ! in hostile foray ere *her* noon of life had  
sped.

How might she have met this trial ?—What her thought  
of him, who must

In the pride of false endurance, thus betray a father's  
trust ?

Till proud spirit, bowed in anguish, brooding thro' the  
silent night,

Staggered 'neath the strong temptation of a swift,  
inglorious flight.



Then, a sterner mood returning, pride resumed its  
wonted sway ;

Bade him heed the tribe's opinion ; pictured what his  
braves might say :

While he strove, with specious reasoning, which he well  
knew for a lie,

To assuage the qualms of conscience—outraged nature's  
stifled cry !

Her obedience?—but th' expression of a flattered vanity  
At the tribute of the council's silent unanimity !

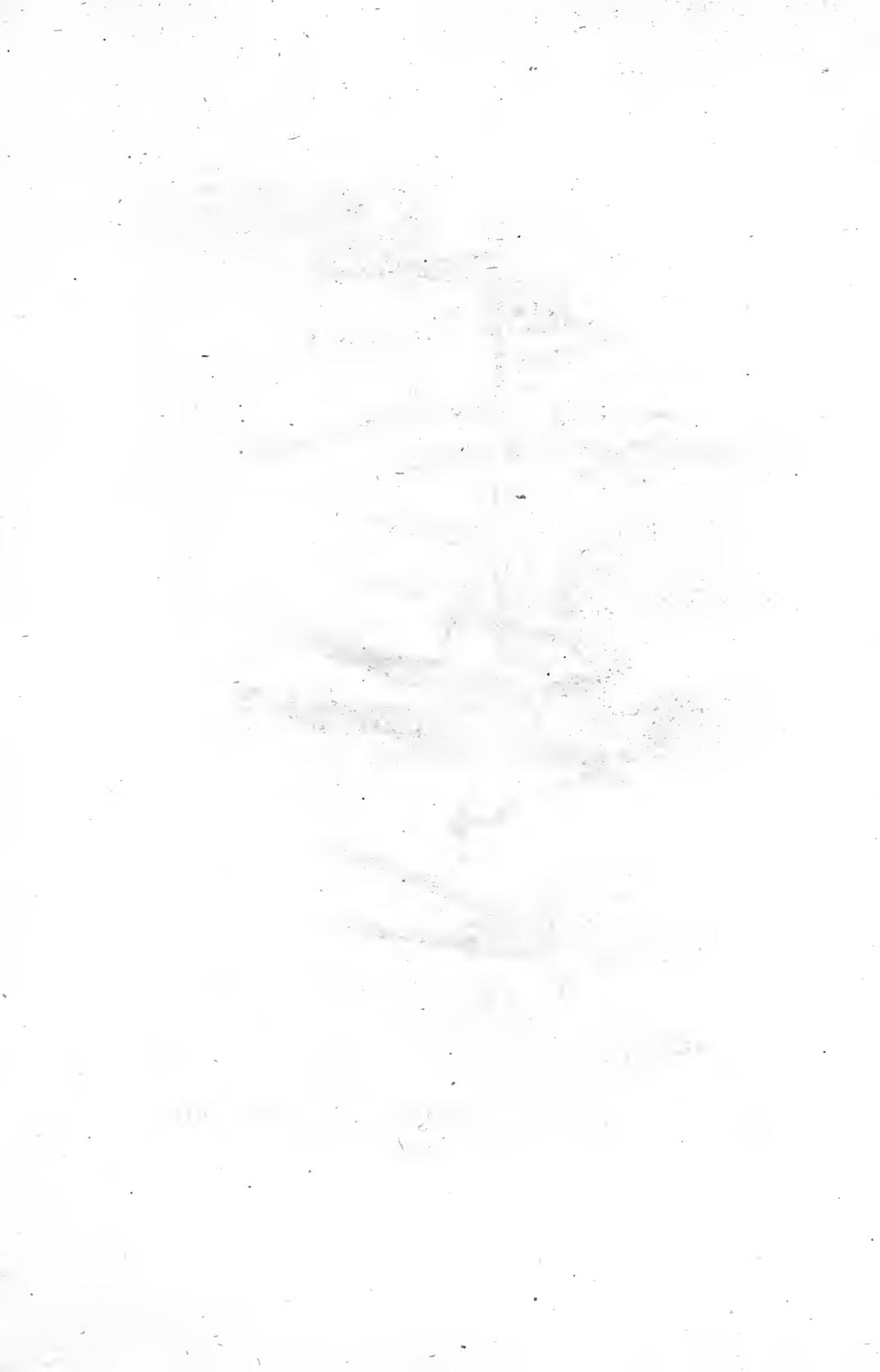
Or if here, too, justice triumphed, muttered with con-  
temptuous thought :

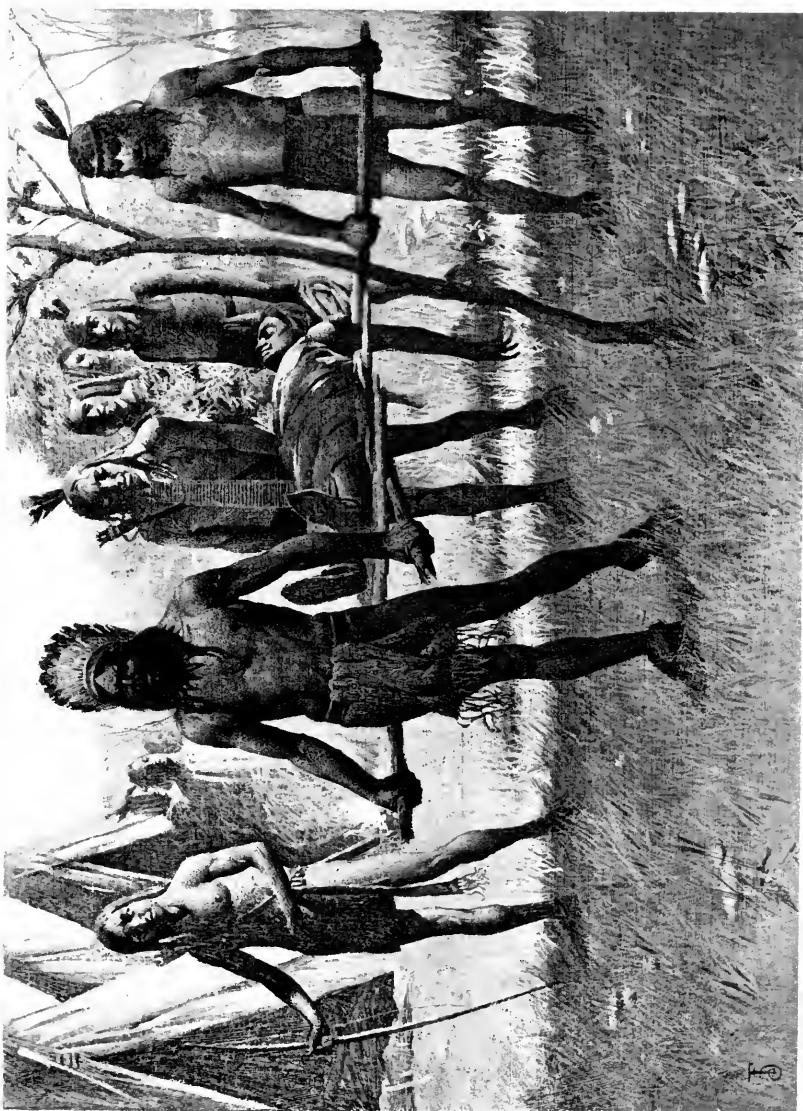
“ After all, she 's but a woman ! ”—and in this a respite  
sought.





*Slow was borne into the village by the young braves  
of the band.*







So the days dragged slowly onward, days of strife and varying mood,

As he watched her steadfast bearing from his gloomy solitude :

And one morn, the treacherous Meda, slain by hostile, unknown hand,

Slow was borne into the village by the young braves of the band.

None mistrusted sullen Kwasind, when the funeral throng drew nigh,

Or, at least, none cared to question with that scowling warrior by.

But th' event was soon forgotten 'mid the press of other calls,

And the stir of preparation for their long march to the Falls.





V.

### THE SACRIFICE.

COME, at length, the fatal evening—for such purpose, all too soon !

—On a scene of matchless glory slow uprose the harvest moon :

Crested wave and shimmering islet, bathed in flood of golden light,

Caught and threw its tremulous radiance far adown the wind-kissed night ;

Soft the mellow moonbeams glinting thro' the leaves on isle and shore,

Spread beneath, their quivering fretwork, interlaced with shadows o'er ;

Now, the full orb's splendor shining, woke to brilliant glistening play

Myriad hues of emerald richness, showers of sparkling diamond spray.



On the cliffs beyond the cataract, ranged like sentinels  
on high,  
Giant trees stood darkly shadowed, spectre-like against  
the sky ;  
Far beneath, the seething river, wrapped in deepest  
midnight gloom,  
Flowed with cruel, swirling torrent thro' the gorge—a  
fitting tomb !  
While, like ponderous portals clang ing 'twixt these  
scenes of death and life,  
Boomed the Falls, their bellowing echoes telling of  
a ceaseless strife ;  
Riven, torn in wildest fury, lashed to foam and clouds  
of spray,  
Like some clamorous monster raging for its long-  
expected prey.



From the shore, in jarring discord with the spirit of the hour,  
Shouts of revelry invaded its sublime, mysterious power :  
Man, the slave of passions rude, in superstition's yoke enthralled,  
Marred the face divine of Nature, by her grandeur unappalled.  
—There they danced in wild carousal, thro' that glorious moonlit night,  
Love and friendship all forgotten, in their orgies' fierce delight ;  
Thinking thus, poor simple children, best the dread wrath to assuage  
Of that Spirit dark, whose roaring told of boundless, sullen rage.



Hark! a distant shout. Swift following, comes a  
momentary hush.

Then, their ill-timed revels quitting, to the river's bank  
they rush :

Up the stream all eyes are straining, toward yon faintest  
speck of white,

Where the frail birch onward dancing, flashes in the  
moon's pale light ;

Large, now larger, grows the object ; till at length the  
kneeling form

Of a maid is seen, her tresses blowing wildly in the  
storm ;

Clasped her hands, her lips half-parted, staring down  
the angry stream

As if spellbound by the horror of some hideous night-  
mare dream !



At that sight, their spell is broken. Cheer reverberates on cheer,  
Till the answering banks re-echo like a scoffing, mocking  
jeer.  
Louder still their cries redouble, as the skiff with  
frightful lunge  
Leaps in where the steadier current gathers for its final  
plunge.  
Passed the head of low-crowned Iris ! Luna gleams !—  
But what is this ?  
Why this stillness, broken only by the thunder of th'  
abyss ?  
Why this sudden pause from shouting, and that swift-  
averted gaze  
To yon point where, circling, eddying past the shore,  
the current plays ?



*Shooting straight to meet his fellow, lo! a second skiff  
they spied.*



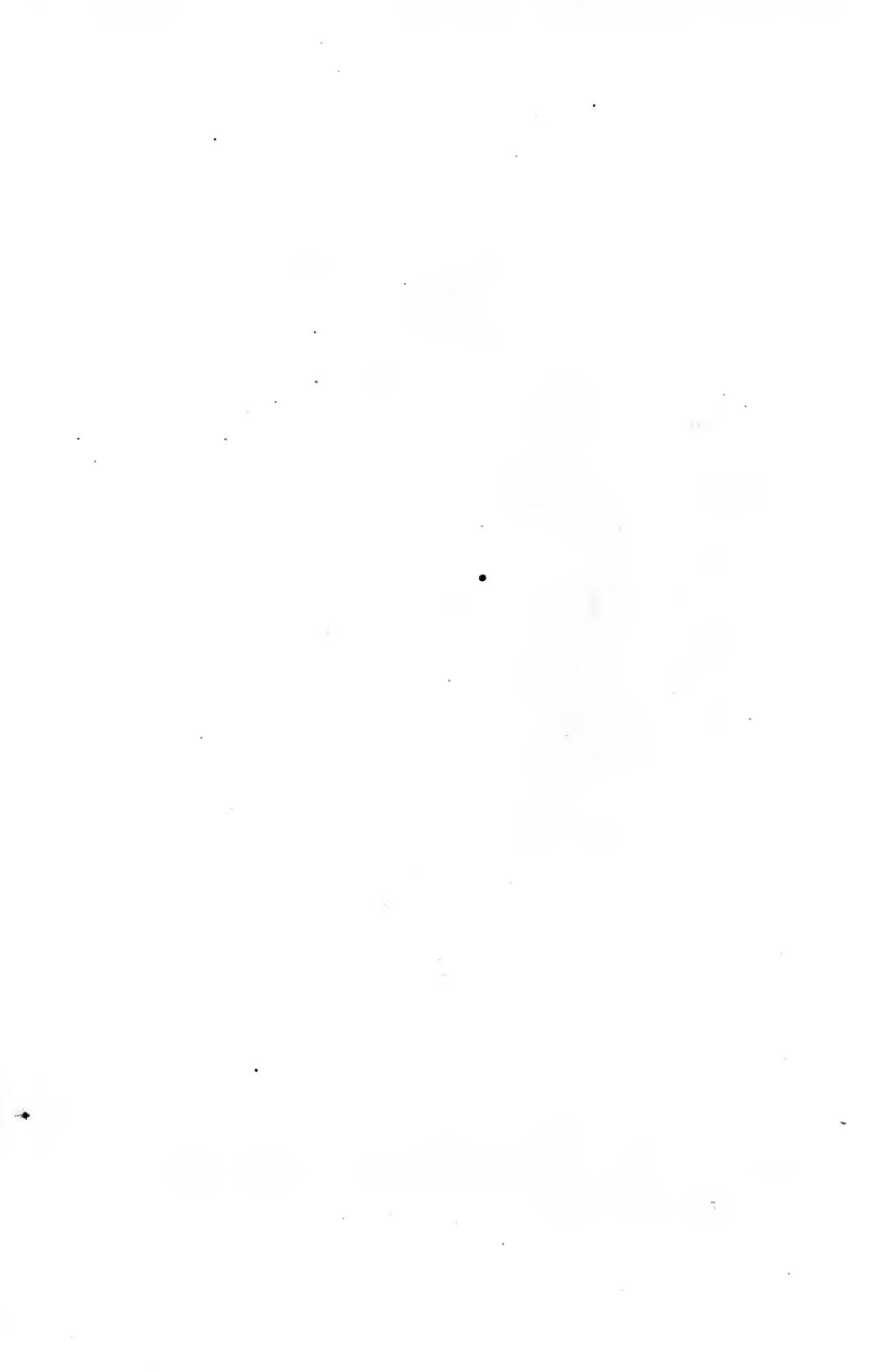




Leaping from the mainland outward, darting, bounding  
o'er the tide,  
Shooting straight to meet its fellow,—lo ! a *second*  
skiff they spied.  
Mark the dripping blade flash brightly, scattering drops  
of silver light,  
As the shallop plunges, lurches, forward urged by  
desperate might !  
See ! it nears ; they strike !—Defiant, stands a swaying,  
stalwart form ;  
Poises high the useless paddle ; hurls it at the ravening  
storm !  
While an arm protecting, shielding, round the startled  
maid is flung :—  
“’T is her father ! Kwasind ! Kwasind !” bursts in frenzy  
from the throng.



\* \* \* *In his tender, yearning eyes,  
Clear she reads the pregnant meaning of that love-  
wrought sacrifice.*







Ay ; 't was Kwasind ! Love, triumphant over every  
fear and doubt,

Love had won the final victory, putting stubborn pride  
to rout.

By that one brief glance at meeting, in his tender  
yearning eyes,

Clear she reads the pregnant meaning of that love-  
wrought sacrifice :—

Not forgotten, not forsaken, in that lonely, bitter hour !

Then, tho' certain death await her, answering to his  
love's strong power

Leaps the light of new-born gladness in her eyes !—  
With quickened breath,

Clasped as one, they pass the portal to the shadowy  
realm of death.





## VI.

### EPILOGUE.

AND in after years, at nightfall—still the Indian legends say—

When each swift revolving Autumn brings again that fatal day,

From Niagara's brow, a shallop thro' the dusk is seen to glide,

Stemming with unwavering course the mighty flood's on-rushing tide;

Till, a jutting headland reached, it swerves, and nears the northern strand,

Where a slight form, dimly shadowed, on the bank is said to stand :

There, its strange freight once embarked, it veers, and downward thro' the night

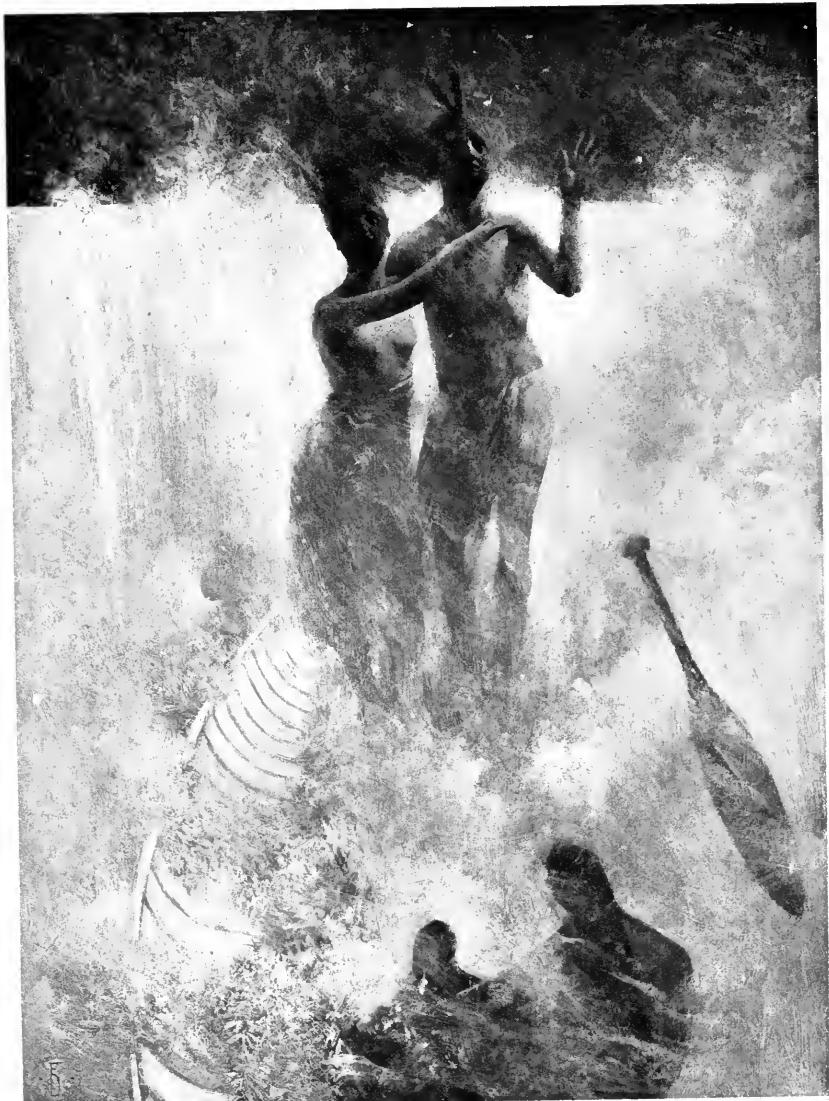
Bears the spectral, kneeling figure of a maiden robed in white.





*Where in strong love clasped together, father, daughter,  
fading sink.*

W. H. (W. H. )  
W. H. (W. H. )





And as often as the phantom nears the head of  
Luna's shores,  
From the bank, another shallop leaps to meet its gliding  
course ;  
Swift by frantic stroke impelled, it intercepts it near the  
brink,  
Where in strong love clasped together, father, daughter,  
fading sink :  
And as surely as they vanish, louder roars the Spirit  
gray ;  
Higher yet, like incense rising, waft the rolling clouds  
of spray ;  
Whilst the moon, her pale face veiling high in Autumn's  
cloud-flecked skies,  
Mourns the unending expiation of that cruel sacrifice.









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